

RELAY FOR LIFE

## Prison inmates take part in Relay for Life



*Pat Johnson is a cancer survivor who participated in the 10th Relay for Life event at the Decatur Correctional Center. Herald & review, Lisa Morrison*

BY THERESA CHURCHILL, H&R Senior Writer

DECATUR – A survivor of uterine and ovarian cancer, Amanda Keith has long participated in the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life.

That's why, after the Lincoln woman was sentenced to prison in 2013, she was happy she could join the Decatur Correctional Center's annual event Thursday evening.

"I was pleasantly surprised," she said. "It's a reminder that even though we're inside, people care about what we go through."

Keith, 35, was among about 300 inmates who decorated luminarias, donating \$2 for each one, in honor of loved ones living with cancer or who lost their lives to the disease.

The luminarias lined the relay route which, for the second consecutive year, could not be contained inside the prison gymnasium because there were so many women wanting to walk.

Warden Shelith Hansbro told the inmates before setting out that in the 10 years the prison has conducted a relay, about 2,200 offenders have helped raise more than \$6,700 for cancer research.

“I was asked if I thought this was normal for a correctional facility,” Hansbro added. “I don't know what their normal is, but this OUR normal.”

Patricia Johnson, 60, of Naperville said she was diagnosed with breast cancer, first in her left breast and then in her right, soon after she was transferred 2011 to the Decatur Correctional Center from Dwight.

“This event means so much to the survivors, and it's good to participate in something that happens in the real world,” she said. “This is a way of giving back.”

Johnson said she decorated two luminarias, one in memory of her dad who died from colon cancer in 2000 and the other for fellow inmate Charlene Martin, 47, of Fairview Heights, who was diagnosed with Stage IV lung cancer about a month ago.

An emotional moment before the relay came when the prison's church choir dedicated a song, “My Life is in Your Hands,” to Martin and to guest speaker Deborah McCammack, whose daughter Angela died of colon cancer three years ago at age 34.

Another came afterward when Hansbro presented a check for \$900 to Lara Grobosky, event chairwoman for Macon County Relay for Life.

“That's awesome,” said Martin, who navigated Thursday's event in a wheelchair. “That's really awesome.”